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**From closed museum spaces to inclusive cultural meeting points:
connecting indigenous heritage collections and communities in the
Dominican Republic**

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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

As museums face more scrutiny and are being demanded to decolonize, there are opportunities for Dominican museums to adopt a critical perspective and turn their collections and exhibitions into connections to our cultural past, present, and future. Nevertheless, specific research on archaeological collections in the Dominican Republic, the earliest hub of the European invasion, conquest, and colonization of the New World, has been scarce. The present research consists of an exploratory study that seeks to answer the larger question of how Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic can be connected with communities to empower them for constructing a multivocal and inclusive cultural history. Community connections can also contribute to improve preservation and protection efforts and provide insight into how communities, private collectors, and public and private heritage managers view these connections.

There are two main objectives for this study: first, to help identify the scope of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic in the context of heritage legislation and management, and second, to provide insight into how museums can connect with communities to develop a better understanding of Indigenous heritage collections and thereby help preserve and protect them. The study looked at the nature of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic and how these collections have formed. It evaluated how different communities have access to these collections and how such access can be expanded to create inroads for connecting at different levels: for example, beyond the guided tours at architectural sites that are found mainly in larger urban or tourist-heavy areas around the country.

This qualitative study explored how communities can be engaged to critically analyze museum narratives that perpetuate colonial ideas of Caribbean Indigenous extinction which contribute to a disconnection from Indigenous heritage collections. Critical museology and decolonizing methodologies were used as a framework to propose connections that integrate the multicultural and multiethnic community experiences that make up the region to improve how today our society understands and values the legacies of our Indigenous heritage, and how these legacies impact identity formation. The framework was used to determine how to facilitate community connections to Indigenous heritage collections that lead to multivocal engagements and inclusive meeting points for cultural self-determination, by answering the following research questions: RQ1) What is the scope of archaeological collections in the Dominican Republic in terms of where they are located, who has custody of them, who uses

them, and what information about them is available to the public? RQ2) How do current Dominican heritage laws hinder or foster community access to archaeological collections? RQ3) How do communities access Dominican Indigenous heritage collections? RQ4) How can collection mapping and technology play a role in community access and protection of Dominican Indigenous heritage? RQ5) What can be done to connect communities with Indigenous heritage collections?

Data was gathered by the review of documents, conducting surveys and interviews, and through participant observation in local activities to explore the attitudes and types of access to collections different communities have. The main findings of the study show that there are opportunities to connect communities with Indigenous heritage collections by improving access based on multivocal and inclusive approaches for the design of education and exhibition initiatives as well as the representation of cultural practices beyond traditional museum borders. Enhanced documentation systems, geographical decentralization of museums, and increasing awareness of heritage legislation for preservation efforts, also provide opportunities to connect by developing narratives that are important to the community and where they can see their cultural practices represented.

This study provides future scholars with a foundational reference to help deepen their knowledge of Indigenous heritage institutions and their role in the community. The study offers practical suggestions for developing and incorporating critical museology approaches to the creation of community connections with Indigenous heritage institutions in the Dominican Republic. It may also assist heritage managers and public officials in improving how heritage education programs are designed to make the collections more relevant to the communities they aim to serve. Future researchers can also use this study to identify patterns in community involvement that may further demonstrate the value of critically framing heritage institutions' efforts to improve preservation initiatives. The study contributes to the groundwork for a practical approach for the creation of multivocal engagements and inclusive meeting points for cultural self-determination that seeks to connect with the Indigenous heritage in the Dominican Republic under public and private care.